

BRIEFING NOTE FOR NMR

MFSE SITUATIONAL UPDATE – FE

- Refs: A. Military Family Services – Operating Plan 2014-2016 issued November 2014
B. E-mail CO CFSU (E) / NMR dated November-26-14 4:26 PM
C. E-mail CO CFSU (E) / FE CoC dated November-28-14 12:17 PM
D. Discussion CO CFSU (E) / RSM CFSU (E) / MFSE Pgm Mgr dated 18 Mar 15
E. Mtg CO CFSU (E) / MFSE Regional Mgr / MFSE Pgm Mgr dated 31 Mar 15
F. E-mail CO CFSU (E) to Admin O / Det Comds / MFSE dated Wed 01/04/2015 9:50 AM (NOTAL)

AIM

1. To provide NMR SHAPE with an update on the current MFS challenges and perceptions across FE as seen by the CoC and make recommendations for possible solutions in key areas.

BACKGROUND

2. In mid-November 2014, CFMWS issued their new Operating Plan (reference A). This document appears to have been written as a trigger to provide the CAF and DND a snapshot for the MFS situation. Noted within the Executive Summary to reference A, the following excerpt is provided:

“After two decades of reacting to emerging requirements and finding focused solutions to pressing problems, the current operational respite offers the opportunity to take a step back, listen intently, evaluate the effectiveness and coherence of institutional supports to military families, and re-calibrate”

The document provides a historical review of Family Services in the CAF, provision of priorities and goals, but falls well short of providing a road map / plan of how any of this will be achieved. The document refers to the post-2000 period throughout most of the document, however emphasizes the post-Afghan period as an opportunity to reload and change during some “down time.” As stated above, the document highlights that the CAF is now in a period of operational respite, which has been proven to be far from the truth. Even prior to the deployment of Op IMPACT, CAF members within FE continued to depl on operations and extended exercises, highlighting the highly unfortunate Canada-centric view of MFS within the context of their Operating Plan. Further, many of the challenges faced by FE families are not replicated in the US, where the majority of families have access to US MWR facilities, nor to any MFRC within Canada. For this reason, the European dynamic requires out-of-the-box thinking to achieve an appropriate solution set with perhaps additional resources specifically targeted to meet this unique need.

3. After initial discussions at reference B, a query was forwarded to the FE CoC at reference C, to glean first-hand insight and perspective WRT MFSE support perceptions. Although not all individuals queried, provided a response, it is believed that those who did respond, provide an acceptable level of breadth and situational variance to meet the intent of the query. These responses were further discussed with the MFSE Program Manager at references D, in order to achieve a balanced view / approach to the challenges identified.

4. Further, MFSE Regional Mgr met with the NMR during the week of 23 Mar 15 to provide an update on MFS within FE. At reference E, discussions were held to determine the next steps in improving service delivery / outputs of MFSE.

DISCUSSION

5. The predominance of comments received from the FE CoC can be split across the larger community versus dispersed locational divide. That is to say, the majority of comments received from regions where a MFSE hub exists (such as Naples, SHAPE, Brussels and GK) are consistent, as are those from locations where no MFSE hub exists. There is a consistent message, that support at a MFSE hub location meets the expectations of most, although a lack of spousal employment remains an area of frustration across all of FE (albeit that members are advised of this as part of the Screening Interview process, it needs to be emphasized as early as possible, and that will likely remain an area of contention). The ability to gather together in a community setting is seen as the most crucial aspect of support in the MFSE hub locations and is widely accepted and benefited from across these locations.

6. The challenges highlighted primarily within Remote locations will be the primary focus of this BN. The following are the major areas of concerns raised in Remote locations:

- a. Dispersed Nature of CAF Members. Many personnel in remote locations have little expectations of MFS, seeing the organization as predominately estb in hub type locations. This dynamic forces families to try to establish their own support networks in an international environment where neither English nor French are necessarily the primary language. This makes any true community based / face-to-face activity near impossible. MFSE has estb several online meetings (such as coffee mornings etc.) in order to better support dispersed families, however this opportunity has not met with the response expected, as many families appear somewhat reticent to access or use these online facilities. In discussions at references D and E, current outreach calls are conducted every few months, however will be increased to monthly with the intent of bridging the gap and increasing participation levels if possible;
- b. Lack of Spousal Employment. This is seen and specifically highlighted as a major area of concern in remote locations. The reality of this issue is greatly increased due to the lack of true community activity resident in non-hub locations as the spouse is more isolated in a non-English / French environment. Also, comments were provided WRT the use of CV writing opportunities etc in order to target local employment; however these MFSE workshops are targeted to assist the spouse with reintegrate into the Canadian workforce on return to Canada. The online opportunities highlighted above, are seen as one of the few viable ways of improving connection between Canadians, however, will not change the employment options in these locations;
- c. Local Language Training. Several comments have been made about options for local language training contracts vice the singular use of Rosetta Stone type products. This type of training could provide families, with emphasis on spouses, some added ability to engage in local community based activities. In discussion with the MFSE Regional Mgr and MFSE Pgm Mgr, this option does in fact already exist, and is being used in areas within Italy as an

example. This is specifically targeted at spouses as a parallel option to Rosetta Stone. This additional training option is used as an adjunct to Rosetta Stone, and is focussed to support specific learning habits of spouses. Should Rosetta Stone not provide the requisite capability, other options will be explored (included possible contracted language training) in coordination between MFSE and the individual. Communication of this option by MFSE is critical to address the awareness shortfall. It was also highlighted that efforts are underway to develop more location specific details within a "Thriving in Europe" type of book;

- d. Duplication of Effort. In several locations, multiple nations (such as US or UK) provide similar services to those being offered by MFSE. Efforts are underway this year to reduce this duplication of effort by location in order to better focus on the specific requirement or gaps at that location;
- e. Communication. Several of the concerns raised by the FE CoC / staff highlight a lack of understanding or knowledge of programs / opportunities which are available to them and their communities. In order to address this information gap, trg was conducted this past fall for MFSE staff on how to best conduct Outreach calls to families, and provide details of programs available. This however remains a challenge based on personality traits of those initiating the calls. This trg will now be initiated annually and is to include continuation / refresher training to improve the lines of communication to families on a monthly basis. The importance of this was emphasized during discussions at reference D and forms the basis of the entire Outreach program;
- f. Dependant Education. This area of concern highlights the variance between Canada and FE. While MFRCs provide some overarching linkages to schools and counsellors, this falls outside the MFSE mandate and capability as it is housed within CEM / Dep Ed co-located with CFSU (E); and
- g. Access to Posting Messages / Personal Family Information. This issue, while not linked specifically to comments from FE CoC, is of specific concern as CFSU (E) is the central personal information repository for FE. We currently have information provided through DWAN and thereby protected by its inherent security architecture and encryption capabilities. Many of the MFSE and PSP employees who support families across Europe, are not necessarily linked in via a DVPNI capability (nor is this truly supportable from a 76 Comm Gp Det GK perspective) and therefore would not have specific access to family information / posting messages. Also, many of the e-mail addresses used by "work from home" employees are *Gmail* or *Hotmail* domains, which are Internet based. Passage of information across these means for family information is not acceptable, but creates an added challenge to information sharing to support our families. This challenge will be exasperated in the near term, by the anticipated shift by CFMWS to establish MFS under their own CFMWS domain (although no confirmed date has been received), as is currently the case for much of PSP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Several of the concerns raised by Canadian communities across FE are realities of OUTCAN postings, and some ownership of the issue falls to the CAF members and their families in accepting posting overseas. It is understood however, that the "OUTCAN Posting" perception can change very quickly upon arrival at post.

- a. Needs Assessments. This activity is currently being planned as a CFMWS venture, to include both MFS and PSP, however in discussion with both MFSE and PSP Mgr (E), it appears that it will once again be quite Canada-centric. For this reason, MFSE and PSP Mgr (E) staffs are working to develop such an assessment tool that will meet the needs of FE communities. This assessment is in its final stages of preparation and should be available for promulgation in the near term. In order to truly understand each location, the completion of these assessments is imperative and long overdue, but will require NMR auth to release to families across FE;
- b. Communication. This appears to continue to be a challenge within FE and is certainly not unique to MFSE. It is imperative that the requisite time be taken by the MFSE Regional Manager to conduct outreach calls to the FE CoC at each location on a recurring basis to ensure that the concerns of the communities are brought to light in a timely manner and in such a fashion as to be able to work towards coordinated solutions. In discussion at reference E, a frequency of four times per year (quarterly) was seen as a good start point, and would be initiated as soon as possible.
- c. Information Availability. Significant effort has been taken to provide pre-recorded messages by SMEs (as would be provided during Welcome Briefs at hub locations). While not yet complete, this type of information is paramount for new families to get more familiar with the processes inherent in a posting to FE. MFSE will provide CO CFSU (E) a firm date (pre-APS 15) by which time they will require this information with CO CFSU (E) following up with specific sub-units to meet this target date.
- d. Provision of Posting Instrs. The availability of family information to MFSE is paramount in order to ensure their ability to provide family related services and outreach. To date, the provision of this data has proven problematic and disjointed across CFSU (E) and its Dets. The distribution of the information has been based primarily on individual decision and methodologies vice a coordinated action. IAW reference F, CO CFSU (E) has implemented such distribution, with particular Information Security caveats in place to ensure that the said electronic information remains within the DWAN security enclave. Should further distribution be required, MFSE Information Sharing Protocols, as discussed at reference E, will be implemented. Finalization of this protocol is currently underway and will be reviewed by CO CFSU (E) to ensure security risk to said information is reduced as much as possible.
- e. Information Security. CFMWS should be queried for their intent / plan to ensure Information Security concerns are addressed in a manner that is conducive to the OUTCAN dispersion dynamic in general and FE in particular. Initial discussions at reference E would indicate that the CFMWS

domain will not necessarily have the DWAN security architecture in place however this has not been confirmed at the technical level. It is currently anticipated that access to DWAN terminals will be retained by, as a minimum, the MFSE Regional Mgr, MFSE Pgm Mgr, MFS Community Service Mgrs at hub locations.

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